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The "New" Out-of-Print Marketplace

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Against the Grain

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JUNE 2003

Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

The "New" Out-of-Print Marketplace

by **Narda Tafuri** (Acquisitions Librarian, Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Memorial Library, University of Scranton, Scranton, PA 18510-4634; Phone: 570-941-7811; Fax: 570-941-7809) <tafuri1@scranton.edu>

In 1994, my husband and I attended the *Out-of-Print Book Seminar*, a four day intensive course for those interested in entering the out-of-print book business held at **Colorado College** in Colorado Springs and led by then editor of *AB Bookman's Weekly*, **Jacob Chernosky**. Since this introduction to the world of out-of-print books I have seen the business shift from its years-old traditions of "want lists" and postcards to its present dot.com model where titles are easily searched and acquired online at prices that have gotten lower and lower. In my article for this special issue of *Against the Grain* on out-of-print materials, I give a quick overview of the challenges librarians face in the new out-of-print marketplace and a short glossary of terms to get you started.



As the wife of an out-of-print bookseller, I have drawn upon my husband's experience in this evolving business and have coerced him to give us an insider's view of what it's all about. **Peter Tafuri**, owner of **Frost Pocket Farm** books, will teach us what it takes to be an Internet based out-of-print bookseller in today's OP marketplace, in case you are inclined to give up your day job.

Richard Weatherford was there when the revolution of bringing the OP book business onto the "Information Superhighway" began. In fact, he was one of those leading the charge, first as president of **Interloc** and later as founder of **Alibris**. **Dick** takes us back to the "good old days" and gives us a "heads up" on where we're likely to be going in the future.

Just at a point when many out-of-print/used bookstores are closing their doors and going strictly online, **David Gray** and **Malcolm Brantz** are finding ways to stretch the shrinking acquisitions dollar, as well as encourage faculty involvement in the acquisitions process, through using independent, wholesale, and mega bookstores for collection development at **Marshall University** and the **Colorado Christian University**.

A whole new life is being given many out-of-print books through the use of digital scanning projects now under way. **John Riley** gives an overview of two ongoing projects. **John** interviews **John Mark Ockerbloom**, founder of

continued on page 18

If Rumors Were Horses

A lot's been happening, just like always. First off, I think I goofed! (That never happens.) I have been meaning to tell y'all about **KATHRYN BOYD** who is the wonderful new Head of the **Acquisitions Services Department** at **SUNY Albany** as of February 13. **Kathryn** comes from the **Queens Borough Public Library** in Jamaica, New York, where she served as Coordinator of Collection Development, among other positions. She holds an M.L.S. in Library and Information Science and an MA

in French Language and Literature, both from the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**. Ms. Boyd will manage a department of 18 and is responsible for ordering, receiving, licensing and paying for all information resources provided to the

campus by the **University Libraries** as well as managing the funds that pay for these resources. Zut, alors!

What are you doing Sunday, June 22 from 1:30 — 5:30? The awesome **Athena Michael** <amichael@wiley.com> wants us to come to the **AAP/ALCTS Joint Committee** program — **Digital Rights, Digital Wrongs: The Impact of International Copyright Law on What Gets Published (And What Librarians Can Buy)** during the **ALA Annual Conference** in Toronto. The program looks great and includes among others the awesome **October Ivins** <october.ivins@mindspring.com>, **Sarah Sully** (JSTOR), **Ian Jacobs** (Palgrave), **Stephen Abram** (Micromedia ProQuest, Canada), **Peggy Johnson** (University of Minnesota), and **Paul Whitney** (Vancouver Public Library). This is located in the **Westin Hotel, Frontenac Ballroom**. Be there or be square!

More. **Norman Desmarais's** youngest daughter, **Denise**, graduated from **Providence College** on May 18! When a faculty member's child graduates from the College there is a tradition of letting

continued on page 6

What To Look For In This Issue:

Books Are Us	70
Biz of Acq	78
Lost in Austin	92
Inside Pandora's Box	93
Talk of the Trade	94
Issues in Vendor/Library Relations	96
Innovations Affecting Us	100

Profiles Encouraged

Narda Tafuri	18
Peter Tafuri	24
Dick Weatherford	28
David Gray	38
Malcolm Brantz	40
Michelle Flinchbaugh	80
William H. Hall Free Library	105

Interviews

Deanna Ramsay	48
Joe Lee	50
Vladimir Zaitsev	52
Ernie Ingles	56
Roger Press	62



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people profile

BORN & LIVED: Born and raised on Staten Island, NY; lived briefly in Colorado Springs, CO and Lake Parsippany, NJ before moving in 1989 to the "Great Northeast" of Pennsylvania.

EARLY LIFE: Playing with plastic dinosaurs, exploring Native American cultures, looking for fossils, and reading, reading, reading.

FAMILY: Currently cohabitate with 2 cats, 1 dog and 1 husband in Fleetville, PA.

EDUCATION: New York University, NY: MA in Anthropology; emphasis in Archeology, 1987 State University of New York, University at Albany: MLS, 1993.

FIRST JOB: Working as an Administrative Assistant at The Saitama Bank, Ltd., on Wall Street, NYC in 1975.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Acquisitions Librarian at The University of Scranton (1994 to present). From 1990 to 1994, I was the Assistant Director and then Director of the Learning Resources Center at Keystone Junior College (now called Keystone College). I feel very privileged to be able to be involved in my profession on both the state and national levels through my participation on the Board of the College & Research Division of the Pennsylvania Library Association and as a member of the ALCTS AS Publication Committee and as current (and past) Chair of the ALCTS Out-of-Print Discussion Group. The wonderful people I have met through these associations are what make this profession great!

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Walk in the woods, hunt for flea market finds and interact with other species.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, and *Death in Holy Orders* — I love a good mystery!

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Whiners and complainers. It's easy to complain when something is wrong; however, it's far harder to find a solution to fix it.

PHILOSOPHY: "The Golden Rule" and "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...And It's All Small Stuff."

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Being promoted this year to the rank of Associate Professor.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I see the revitalization of the profession as the public begins to realize the importance of unrestricted access to information and the subsequent need for information professionals to retrieve that information. However, I also see the need for higher education to reevaluate the core competencies needed for the MLS in general, and technical services in particular. As the "graying" of the profession continues we need to have competent, resourceful, professional librarians available to fill the impending void.

A Good Book is Not that Hard to Find: Librarians and the New Out-of-Print Marketplace

by **Narda Tafuri** (Acquisitions Librarian, Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Memorial Library, University of Scranton, Scranton, PA 18510-4634; Phone: 570-941-7811; Fax: 570-941-7809) <tafurin1@scranton.edu>

I was using one of the out-of-print (OP) metasearch engines (**AddAll** <http://www.addall.com/used> or **Bookfinder** <http://www.bookfinder.com>) to locate an out-of-print book that had been requested by a faculty member. After a quick online search, I located what I thought was the volume I needed. This was a difficult request as the book I needed was part of a two-volume set. I had been successful in getting volume two, but volume one eluded me.

The online description of the book gave very little information—the condition was listed as "very good," publisher and year was given, and the book had no "dj" (dust jacket). There was no clue at all as to whether it was volume one or two though the publication year seemed to indicate that it was volume one. I sent an e-mail message to the OP bookseller asking if the book was the volume I was looking for and awaited a response. A short, to the point, message came back: "Yes. Book is available."

So, I had our Treasurer's Office send off a check for \$11.00 (\$8.00 to cover the cost of the book and \$3.00 for shipping and handling) and waited for the book to arrive. This



was in the pre-credit card days and we had no other way to pay for an item. Some out-of-print booksellers would take a purchase order; others demanded "cash upfront." When

the book finally arrived, it was in the condition stated in the online description, but it was not the volume I needed. I asked my acquisitions clerk to follow-up and contact the OP bookseller, explain our situation and return the book for a refund.

A letter was written and the book returned. Some time went by, but we received no response from the OP bookseller. After enough time had elapsed that the book should have been received and a refund issued, I suggested that she might try calling the OP bookseller. She called a couple of times and left messages but still no answer. Finally, she tried again and got an elderly gentleman on the phone. She explained the problem with the book, the fact that we had returned it, and that we had not received a refund. She told the OP bookseller that we wanted the cost of the book refunded as it did not meet our needs. The OP bookseller, who happened to be based in Long Island, NY, told my acquisitions clerk that he would have to check with Vito and get back with her—he further informed her that Vito was his dog.

A long while passed after this conversation. Needless to say the \$8.00 check did not appear in the mail. A question I asked myself at this point was, for \$8.00 should I just chalk this up to experience? Not all online booksellers are created equal and this could just be another online scam. I decided to give it another shot. After all, anyone with a dog can't be all bad—I have a dog and two cats—and perhaps I could reason with a fellow New Yorker. So I dialed the number and got the OP bookseller on the phone. I started slowly and explained my situation.

continued on page 20


The "New Out-of-Print Marketplace" from page 1

the **Online Books Page** located at the **University of Pennsylvania** and now providing links to over 18,000 English language titles. **John** continues his investigation of digitization projects with a description of the ongoing efforts of the **National Yiddish Book Center** which is helping to preserve and revive out-of-print books that were once thought lost.

Lest you think that books are the only items to fall out of general distribution, **Gary Handman** at **UC Berkeley** takes us on a tour of the out-of-distribution (OD) video marketplace to help us locate that long lost copy of "Babes on Broadway."

Finally, to get an inside track on book bar-

gain hunting in Toronto, I have interviewed **Deanna Ramsay**, an out-of-print bookseller in Ontario, Canada for over sixteen years. **Deanna** is the Webmistress of *Littera Scripta*, a website providing resources for readers, rare book collectors and used booksellers. As the daughter of a former bush pilot she knows the adventure searching for a good book can bring.

In the world of out-of-print books and out-of-distribution videos the more things change the more they stay the same. Sometimes it's not the purchase of an OP book that gives you a thrill, it's the hunt, the quest for something you thought you'd never be able to locate let alone buy. It's the indescribable feeling you have that someday an email message will show up in your inbox to let you know that book you've been searching for has finally arrived! 

<<http://www.against-the-grain.com>>